

## AMERICORPS STATE COMPETITIVE GRANT REVIEW (12/2018)

<b>Task Force Final Recommendation:</b>	Forward to CNCS competition for funding
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<b>RFP Due Date:</b> 12/11/2018	<b>Project Name:</b> LearningWorks AIMS HIGH
<b>Application Number :</b> 19AC209685	<b>Project Contact:</b> Lauren Ouellette
<b>Legal Applicant:</b> LearningWorks	<b>MSYs and Slots requested:</b> 19.93 MSY; 56 slots
<b>Grant Type:</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Cost reimbursement <input type="checkbox"/> Fixed Amount <input type="checkbox"/> Education Award Only	<b>Budget Proposed</b> CNCS funds <u>\$ 286,338.00</u> Local Match <u>\$ 390,746.00</u> Cost per Members <u>\$14,367</u>

**Other than the legal applicant, please list the agencies or organizations that appear to be the major collaborators or partners in this grant.**

Portland Public Schools - East End Community School, Reiche Community School, Riverton Elementary School  
Westbrook School Department - Saccarappa Elementary  
Data Innovation Project (in-kind evaluation services)

**Applicant proposes to deliver services: (select what the applicant states in their application that their program will cover:**

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Within a single municipality   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Within a single County but not covering the entire County |
| <input type="checkbox"/> County-wide in a single County | <input type="checkbox"/> Multiple Counties but not Statewide                                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Statewide                      |   |

**Which CNCS focus area does this applicant identify as related to its proposal? Do the applicant's activities in each focus area fall under the type of activities CNCS says are acceptable (see RFP page 82-9)? Do the performance measures chosen match the focus area?**

Focus Area Identified	Activities are within list of acceptable for funding
<input type="checkbox"/> Disaster Services	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Education	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> Environmental Stewardship	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> Healthy Futures	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> Economic Opportunity	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> Veterans and Military Families	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No

Do the applicant's activities fall under the type of activities CNCS says are acceptable under the focus area the applicant selected?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Does the proposal fall in a CNCS funding priority for this competition?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Does the proposal fall in a MCCS funding priority?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No

Performance Measures	
Do the Service Activity performance measures chosen match the focus area?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Do the Capacity Building performance measures match one of the sets listed in the RFP?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Do the Member Development performance measures exactly match the set provided in the RFP?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No

## Executive Summary

LearningWorks proposes to place 52 AmeriCorps members who will provide 1:1 and small group tutoring for low-performing and economically disadvantaged elementary school students in four schools in Portland and Westbrook, ME. Members will serve 380 low-performing students; of these, 320 will improve their academic performance in reading and/or math and 320 will increase their positive behavioral and/or emotional engagement in school. Members will also leverage 50 community volunteers who will provide students with additional academic and social-emotional support. This program will concentrate on the CNCS focus area of Education - K-12 Success. The CNCS investment of \$286,338 will be matched with \$390,746, including \$56,000 in public funding and \$80,202 in private funding.

**Performance measures** (targets proposed for Year 1; targets for years 2 and 3 set in continuations):

### SERVICE ACTIVITIES

OUTPUT: ED1A: Number of individuals served

Proposed target: 380

OUTCOME: ED5A: Number of students with improved academic performance

Proposed target: 320

OUTCOME: ED27C: Number of students with improved academic engagement or social-emotional skills

Proposed target: 320

### MEMBER DEVELOPMENT – CNCS DOES NOT PERMIT APPLICANTS TO ENTER THESE INTO PROPOSAL. COMMISSION REQUIRES OF AWARDEES.

OUTPUT: Number of AmeriCorps program training and other formal development activities that result in increased AmeriCorps member skills, knowledge, and abilities related to the service assignment

Proposed target:

OUTCOME: Number of AmeriCorps members demonstrating increased competency in skills or application of knowledge.

Proposed target:

### CAPACITY BUILDING -- CNCS DOES NOT PERMIT APPLICANTS TO ENTER THESE INTO PROPOSAL. COMMISSION REQUIRES OF AWARDEES.

OUTPUT:

Proposed target:

OUTPUT:

Proposed target:

OUTCOME:

Proposed target:

## Scoring Detail:

**Peer Reviewer Consensus Score.** *Assessment of narrative using point distribution from federal agency. Major categories (Program Design, Organizational Capability, Budget and Cost) are dictated by CFR rubric for scoring. The break downs within categories are from federal agency and change annually.*

CATEGORY	Qualitative Rating	Points
<b>Rationale &amp; Approach/Program Design Section (50%)</b>		
Theory of Change, Evidence, and Logic Model (28)	Strong	28
Evidence tier – category + score (8)	Moderate	6
Evidence quality – (8)	Strong	8
Notice Priority (0)	Strong	0
Member Experience (6)	Strong	6
<b>Organizational Capability Overall Rating 25%</b>		
Organizational Background and Staffing (9)	Strong	9
Compliance and Accountability (8)	Strong	8
Culture that Values Learning (6)	Strong	6
Member supervision (2)	Strong	2
<b>Cost Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy 25%</b>		
Cost Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy (25)	Strong	25
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>98</b>
Evaluation Plan	Adequate	0
90-100, Strongly Recommend for Further Review		

**Task Force Consensus Score.** *The Task Force reviewers assess the additional technical criteria that states are directed to consider by the CFR.*

		Score
Program Model	Strong	15
Past Performance	Adequate	10.05
Financial Plan	Strong	10
Fiscal Systems	Strong	10
<b>Total Task Force Score</b>		<b>45.05</b>
<b>Peer Review Score</b>		<b>98</b>
<b>Final Score for Applicant</b>		<b>143.05 of 150 potential</b>

**Final Assessment of Application:**

- ☒ Forward Application to National Competition with no corrections/modifications
- ☐ Forward to National Competition with corrections/modifications
- ☐ Do Not Forward to National Competition

**Referenced Conditions/Corrections**

- N/a

## Peer Reviewer Notes and Appraisal Summary:

### Section: Program Design (50 %)

*Note: CNCS has subdivided this part of the narrative into 5 parts. The comments indicate the part and follow the narrative outline in the RFP.*

#### Theory of change (narrative text) and logic model

- The Proposed intervention responds directly to the community problem of low academic performance due to poverty levels and ELL. It clearly articulates the design, dosage, target population, and roles of AmeriCorps members and community volunteers. AIM HIGH is modeled after two similar & successful interventions.
- The applicant clearly stated the problem, the context / system contributing to the problem and plans to align services with the practices that have demonstrated success in other communities with similar challenges. Dosage (frequency and amount of contact) matches the best practice (in the evidence). Affected students are better prepared to transition to the next grade. Volunteerism expands. The logic model goes beyond outputs (# of students impacted) to number of the students demonstrating change, the specific of change and the outcomes achieved by the students, as well as the schools. The narrative for and logic model table provided the necessary information for all 5 points of the logic model criteria.

#### Evidence

- Applicant submitted 2 outside plus 1 internal evaluation using the same intervention which indicate positive outcomes in 3 of 4 key indicators. The 3 submitted reports are of satisfactory methodological quality with adequate sample size and statistical power for the type of evaluation conducted. One of the external reports was completed in less than 6 years (Notre Dame – 3 years); EC was completed 8 years ago. LearningWorks' internal report was completed in 2018.
- There are slight differences between the evidence models and the programs and services to be delivered by LearningWorks. Aim High shares the essentials of EC, but works with a wider age population and appears to offer less time per session and, potentially more sessions (35). In the EC evaluation gains for those who had 35 sessions were stronger. Given the 3-month evaluation and flexibility to continue or stop services, this means that services may end prior to the 35 sessions. EC also calls for a specific curriculum to structure tutoring sessions. LW will provide rigorous training on methodology.

#### Notice Priority

- The proposed intervention fits within the AmeriCorps funding priorities of Education. It “support[s] and/or facilitate[s] access to services and resources that contribute to improved educational outcomes for economically disadvantaged children; improved educational and behavioral outcomes of students in low-achieving elementary schools; and support for economically disadvantaged students [to] prepare for their success in post-secondary educational institutions.”
- K-12 Success through Increased Academic Performance is central to this proposal. Students and schools experience positive short, mid and long term outcomes in student behavior and academic performance, and schools have better data to share about the success of their students. Students are prepared to enter the next grade level or move on to middle-school.

#### Member Experience

- Locally recruited AmeriCorps members will gain skills in classroom management, effective teaching and tutoring strategies, cultural competency, teaching English Language Learners, and partnering with volunteers as a result of their training and service that can be utilized by future employers. Learning Works promotes an inclusive service culture.
- Members will originate from the communities surrounding the schools, receive intensive tutoring (for tutors), be engaged with diverse students, receive tutor training, engage in monthly development opportunities, create plans to develop effective working relationships and be part of a diverse team (as evidenced by differences in previous Aim High cohort).

## **Section: Organizational Capability (25 %)**

### **Organizational Background and Staffing**

- The applicant clearly describes the roles, responsibilities, and structure of the staff which includes oversight at all levels including Site Managers who directly supervise members on site to ensure program activities are allowable and contributing to program outcomes. Included in the application is an organizational chart which clearly outlines the chain of command.
- LearningWorks has a 51 year history of offering services that help people realize their potential and, so doing, build strong communities. They have managed AmeriCorps programs, large federal grants and programs of this scale and much larger. The narrative clearly identifies the implementation team of 4 staff and their roles. Site coordinators are on-site with members to provide support and supervision, as well as liaison with the school. A Program Director, supported by the organization's senior team, is charged with oversight, successful implementation and high quality member experience.

### **Compliance and Accountability**

- The applicant clearly describes LearningWorks monitoring and oversight plan to "prevent and detect non-compliance and enforce compliance through member training" which includes AmeriCorps rules and regulations as well as prohibited activities during orientation. Additionally, written policies and procedures are included in the member handbook and on their website. Members sign contracts which also indicate allowable and non-allowable activities. The CNCS-required report "is generated in accordance with the published CNCS guidelines and overseen by the agency-wide Director of Programs for accuracy and compliance." There is, however, no direct mention of criminal history checks located within this section.
- LW has been working with federal grants for years and has a clean audit record. Their finance team is well staffed and practices associated with data collection, reporting, grant transactions and compliance are in place. Audits are not just a once a year occurrence. There is a monthly internal review and analysis of financial statements. Program delivery and member activities are monitored. Handbooks are in place. Member files are audited. LW seems to have practices, policies and regular check-ins in place that will assure that members only do allowable activity and that backgrounds will be checked.

### **Culture that Values Learning**

- The applicant's strategic plan includes the key goal to "increase programmatic excellence." "Strategies include professional development, attention from agency leadership, strengthening community partnerships, and improving infrastructure to support program delivery." Additionally monthly reports are delivered at all levels within the organization reporting on "program progress" and "outcomes data, accomplishments, and challenges."
- The board, management and staff are focused on measurable impact and collects the data to assess the same. Program excellence is the BIG goal and strategies include professional development, leadership attention, strengthening partnerships and improving infrastructure. Staff and board at every level is engaged. In some organizations this could turn into a reporting system. It appears from the narrative that they are using what they learn to improve their performance.

### **Member Supervision**

- Site Coordinators - have offices on site and supervise members at 2 schools who are trained to follow AmeriCorps and AIMS HIGH policies & expectations. Supervision includes weekly team meetings.
- Site Coordinators, co-located with members at schools, will be trained to follow AmeriCorps and Aim High policies and ensure members have one-on-one and team opportunities for development. The Program Director has past experience with AmeriCorps.

### **Section: Cost and Budget Adequacy (25 %)**

- The budget is submitted without mathematical errors and proposed costs are allowable. The budget is submitted with adequate information to assess how each line is calculated and appears to be in compliance with budget instructions. The submitted match resources necessary to support the project are identified and appear to support the entire amount described in the budget. \*\* It should be noted the MSY of 14,367 is above the grant amount of 13,430.\*\*
- All information appears correct and the cost per MSY is less than the maximum. The details were very helpful in assessing MSY and personnel costs, as well as ensuring that costs necessary to provide worker's comp, healthcare, background checks, etc. were well-detailed.

### **Section: Evaluation Plan Feedback**

- The evaluation plan includes all items listed in the assessment criteria with the exception of the qualifications needed for the evaluator (8 of the 9 items listed). According to the application, the evaluation will be completed internally by program staff.
- The plan includes use of standardized assessments, a teacher survey and a student survey and includes all the of the "musts" except the qualifications needed of the evaluator and full description of the rationale for the design. Use of the performance data to improve the program is not clearly identified.
- The number of sessions discussed is inconsistent in text. Length of sessions is shorter than the model on which the program is based and there is no explanation of why the modification is proposed or evaluation of whether the change alters the results.
- Qualifications of the evaluator are not provided as required.
- Plan does not provide for assessing data before the final year.

**SUMMARY APPRAISAL 1. Having reviewed all elements of the proposal provided to you, do you think that this applicant would be effective in this category of grant?** Yes

### **Comments:**

- The applicant has extensive experience administering this type of program. The current request is a redesign of a former program (AIM HIGH) which includes 3 fundamental changes. The program is also modeled on 2 previous successful external programs: Notre Dame Mission Volunteers AmeriCorps program and the Experience Corps AmeriCorps program.
- The applicant has the experience – as an organization with a solid history of federally funded program delivery, including AmeriCorps – to be successful. They have already run a very similar program, with positive feedback from students and teachers (AIMS HIGH 2018 Program Evaluation), and this is an improved model derived from their previous experience. They have the systems for ensuring accountability, the matching resources and strong partnerships heavily contributing in-kind resources. The evidence base is solid and indicative of the increased performance gained through 1:1 and small group tutoring.

### **What elements of the proposal are unclear?**

- Capacity Building includes recruitment of 50 volunteers but does not indicate how this will be accomplished or over what period of time (1st year or over the 3 year grant period?).
- I am unclear about LW's response to evaluation data. What will they do with what they are learning as they measure the effectiveness of their work? There was a difference in several places re: the number of times students will be engaged each week and the number of minutes (dosage) was less than other successful models. However, it was noted that the dosage chosen by LW was sufficient based on EC. I could not find that reference.

### **What else do you have to say about this proposal?**

- Overall, I believe this is a strong grant proposal. This type of intervention has shown positive proven results in the Notre Dame and Experience Corps programs as well as in the LearningWorks internal evaluation.
- It was clear with defined outcomes and engaged the team size necessary to make the desired impact at multiple locations.

## Task Force Review Notes and Appraisal Summary:

Program Model. This section's criteria relate to alignment of proposal with funding priorities in RFP, significance of program in the context of statewide issues, the applicant's readiness to take on a significant cadre of volunteers (AmeriCorps members) and its demonstrated ability to engage volunteers, and the match between the program traits and Commission funding goals.

- LearningWorks has put together a very well rounded grant application. The application is clearly aligned with the Education funding priority and includes evidence of the model's ability to positively impact the targeted population.
- It is a research based approach to education that is supported not only by the specific model represented by the Notre Dame Mission Volunteers AmeriCorps, but also other programs nationwide.

### Past Performance

- LearningWorks has a history of successfully managing AmeriCorps programs and their application shows that they are able to meet all match requirements and leverage the needed resources to do so.
- As noted in the application this is a redesigned program that is meant to make some fundamental changes to the previous program.

### Financial Plan

- The expense items listed in the budget are allowable under grant rules. Budget narrative calculations are accurate and appropriate. The budget exceeds match requirements. Match sources are allowable under CNCS rules. LearningWorks is in a healthy financial position as evidenced from their tax return.
- While it appears to be a well thought out and adequate budget that will provide for supporting the program, I am confused by some of the accounting of the numbers as they appear to be tallied incorrectly.

### Fiscal Systems

- The Audit from PGM Accounting and Consulting Services shows that LearningWorks was found to be in compliance with the requirements of the federal programs included in the audit. Their financial management systems survey shows that they have proper checks and balances in place. They have a healthy expense to revenue ratio as well as lower debt to equity ratio.
- The elements appear to be included, but I am not able to speak to their accuracy or potential flaws.

## SUMMARY APPRAISAL

1. *Having reviewed all elements of the proposal provided to you, do you think that this applicant would be effective in this category of grant?*

Yes (2)

- They put together a comprehensive proposal with evidence that shows their model can be successful. They have also proposed a solid method for monitoring performance.
- The grant is using research based educational supports that have a track record of success.

*What elements of the proposal are unclear?*

- It was not very clear how the 50 volunteers would be recruited.
- Some of the financial components do not add up.

*What else do you have to say about this proposal?*

- The proposal is strong and worthy of being awarded.